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THE CHURCH
THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

BY THE
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(*Translated from the French*)

The Catholic Church is not a mere "Social Fact"

The origin of the religious Society known as the Catholic Church, is a peculiar one. This society is not a human institution; it is not, like a number of Protestant sects, the mere product of man's instinct or social need, even in the worship he renders to God; it is not a religious club, founded by the common consent of some persons holding similar beliefs, which has succeeded in enlisting millions of members!

The professors Durckheim and Lévy-Bruhl are said to have reformed Sociology by the study of social and group-psychology. They affirmed that their new system explained all institutions and creeds; yet, they could not, without rejecting established historical facts, whittle down the Catholic Church to their general principles.

The Catholic Church is not the outcome of the necessity for association; it is the historic achievement of an individual personality, on whose origin and true character people may differ, but of whose existence as an historical fact there can be no doubt.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this personal bond between the Church and Christ. Sup-

pose this bond does not exist: then, if you can still call your religious system a "Church," the only thing that is left is the spontaneous product of a group of men, the outcome of a psychic impulse which induces the individuals to meet together and give vent to similar religious feelings, or strive to attain a common end. Protestant theology reduces the Church to the level of a mere social institution.

But what authority would such a Church possess? What hold would it have on souls? By what right could it exact their respect and obedience? Its very existence would be at the mercy of the ever-changing caprices of its founders. Thank God, the Catholic Church is something more than a mere cult, something more than the 'Society of Friends" or Quakers or the small Congregation of Plymouth Brethren, or the Union of Chapels of the Countess of Huntingdon. She is absolutely distinct from those local Protestant churches (*Landeskirchen*, national churches), spiritual mothers without authority, whose action is most jealously restricted, and whose right to impose on their children a set form of belief is disputed.

The Supernatural Origin of the Church

The Catholic Church comes from on high, just as the name of Jesus, her Founder. She is God's plan for the redemption and sanctification of fallen mankind; she is the application of the Redemption, the prolongation of the Incarnation; she is in a very true sense, as we hope to show, "Christ Himself"!

She is a visible fact, yet a mystery! Inseparable from human history, and nevertheless an object of faith! I *see* her and I *believe* in her. We can come to her through actual experience, although she over-

flows with invisible supernatural life. This allows us to say: *Credo in Sanctam Ecclesiam*, I believe in the Holy Catholic Church!

Christ truly lives in His Church

Would that those pseudo-reformors[1] had never existed! Not only have they made Christ a principle of discord among men—it is appalling that through this very Name, Christianity has been divided into so many rival sects—but they have even repudiated the Church, under the pretext that she had not realized the ideal and expressed the spirit of her Founder. What folly not to see that by rejecting the bride, they wronged the bridegroom, that by condemning the masterpiece, they injured the author! Therefore the true Christ is no longer with them. They possess but a counterfeit of Him, a sort of vague image dimly apprehended through the dead letter of a document which they interpret to their own confusion.

But the Living Christ, He who now vivifies, sanctifies and comforts the souls, who even to-day engenders heroic self-denial, who to-morrow, and for all time will enkindle in souls the holy flame of sacrifice, will impel them to devote themselves to the care of the poor, the orphans, the sick and the aged and will have them seek for the savage in his smoky hut, or the workman in his filthy garret,—this very Christ, the Master of all time and of all history dwells now in His Church, the great living body which He fills with His spirit, animates with His grace and strengthens by His presence—a presence invisible, but felt and everlasting.

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[1] The French of the XVIIth century surnamed the Protestants "*les gens de la Religion prétendue réformée.*" The 'pretended' or so-called Reformation was a real deformation finally ending in chaos.

We must insist on this ineffable and intimate relation of Christ and His Church. Its full meaning surpasses our human thought. It seems to be the supreme outcome of the union between the Godhead and the Humanity of the Redeemer.

The Church is the Spouse, the Mystical Body of Christ

Already in the 2nd century Saint Irenæus wrote: "*Where Christ is, there is the Church!*" It is none the less true if we put it the other way round: *Where the Church is, there is Christ.* They are as inseparable as bride and bridegroom.

It is the analogy which presents itself naturally to St. Paul when he mentions this bond between Christ and His mystical body; he is constantly insisting on the indissolubility of marriage in this respect; "Surely no man ever hated his own flesh, nay, he doth nourish and cherish it, even as Christ the Church; because we are members of His body" (Eph. V, 29)—members not of His physical body, it is easily seen, but of His mystical Body which is no other than the Church; and although this body consists of a group of men, and is a moral entity, it is none the less as real as His physical Body, because it identifies itself with a society both real and visible.

This theory, or rather this dogma, of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, is extremely rich in meaning; it throws remarkable light on the supernatural beauty, interior and invisible, of that immense body of the faithful, spread all over the earth, reciting the same creed, sharing the same sacraments and ruled by their bishops, all in communion with the Vicar of Christ!

"What is the Church? writes Bossuet in his points for an address to some recently converted ladies (Lebarcq, V,

p. 508)." It is the assembly of the children of God, the army, of the living God, His kingdom, His city, His temple, His throne, His sanctuary, His tabernacle. To put this more profoundly: the Church is Jesus-Christ spread abroad and communicated to each individual of the faithful."

If possible, let us put it in a way that will enable us to penetrate into the interior life of this Church whose sons we have the honour to be, in a manner that will show us, under the purely external relation of the Founder to His creation, an interior and organic relation, viz. that of the head to the body. Every member of that body is inseparably united to every other member and to the whole body; and the body and the members, forming a corporate whole, drink of the same stream of spiritual life.

Looked at from this standpoint, the Church is the mystical Christ or as Bossuet said, she is Jesus-Christ spread abroad and communicated to each individual of the faithful. She takes His name, as the bride takes the name of the bridegroom: "*As the body is one,*" writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, "*and hath many members*; *and all the members of the body, many as they are, form one body*; *so also it is with Christ*" (I Cor. XII, 12).

No doubt, one might have expected: "So also is it with the Church"? But the Apostle wrote: "*So also is it with Christ.*" This Christ, one and manifold as is the body to which He is compared, can only be the Church.

It is not the historical Christ, but the mystical Christ: and this application of names, as well as the word used, should make us understand how close the union is between Christ and His Church; that its basis is as ineffable and incomprehensible as is the

bond which unites the Person of the Word to His most sacred Humanity.

"You must know," says St. Augustine in his commentaries on the Psalms where he gives his most striking ideas on the Pauline theory, "you must know that what is pointed out here is that the head and the body, Christ and His Church, are one single person; do not hesitate to pass from the head to the body, or from the body to the head; however, understand what is proper to the head, what is proper to the body; what belongs to Christ and what to the Church." (*De Doctrina Christiana*, l. III, c. 31)

"Christ in entirety", he says elsewhere, "is the head and the body; the head is God's only Son, the body is His Church, bride and bridegroom; they are two in one flesh". (*De Unitate Ecclesiae*, c. IV.)

The ordinary gloss of the Bible, the authorised commentary of the Middle Ages, throws light on the text to the Corinthians in this curt but pointed note:

"The head and the body are called Christ, because of the ineffable unity of the head and the members. One and the same spirit informs the members, as one and the same soul sees in the eye, hears in the ear and is the principle of every action in all the other limbs."

Thus there is no doubt about this: the Church, the Bride of Christ, the mystical Body, the mystical Christ are one and the same thing: namely, the mass of the faithful united to Christ by faith and living by His life, by sanctifying grace. It is a reality of the moral order, an organized society showing diversity in members and functions, "a genuine reality," as Fr. Prat notes, "since it is the subject of prerogatives, of essential qualities, and of rights." (*The Theology of St. Paul*, I, p. 300).

"The Apostle," says this learned interpreter of St. Paul, considers Christ in two very different ways. When he

identifies with Christ the true lineage of Abraham, the sum-total of believers, when he asserts that in baptism we are immersed or buried in Christ, when he says that Christ has many members and that we are these members, he is not speaking of the natural Christ, but of the mystical Christ. The natural Christ, the Word made flesh, the priest and victim of Calvary, is a part, and indeed the principal part, of the *mystical* Christ; but He is not the whole mystical Christ. The *mystical* Christ is the true vine with its branches, it is the wild olive with its boughs, it is Jesus the bridegroom with the Church his bride, it is the Head together with all the members. The natural Christ redeems us, the *mystical* Christ sanctifies us; the natural Christ died for us, the *mystical* Christ lives in us; the natural Christ reconciles us to His Father, the *mystical* Christ unifies us in Him. In a word, the *mystical* Christ is the Church completing its Head and completed by Him." (o. c. ibid.)

Catholic Solidarity

The mystical Christ lives in us! Catholics, do you realize this fact? It is to impart to you this consciousness, or at least to contribute to its development in you that we deal with this subject, which does not, sad to say, form a part of the common stock-in-trade of Christian oratory and is too jealously confined to theology, but, which is nevertheless so near to you that it is realized in you and lived in you. We are proud to say that a Catholic has no need to seek, outside of his creed, wisdom and splendour of doctrine—so teeming is this creed with unexpected developments, so inexhaustible its wealth—to say nothing of its marvellous adaptability to the moral necessities of mankind. By way of proof, here is a short digression that will not carry us away from our subject.

For the last thirty years, thinkers and, above all, moralists have reminded us with much insistence of

the notion of human solidarity: they have tried, but in vain, to draw from it a principle of moral obligation. They tell us: "You are members of the great human family; you enjoy those good things in which are crystallized the effort, the labour and sweat of thousands of generations; the man who invented the plough "still walks though unseen by the side of the peasant who urges on his oxen along the new furrow."

For a long time this notion of solidarity has been familiar to Catholic thought: we can lend it to others, but not borrow it from them. For, what is the Communion of Saints but the very idea of our supernatural solidarity? What is the Church, the mystical body of Christ, if it is not our solidarity in Christ and with Christ? Quite naturally, the Catholic way of thinking embraces all mankind. Thinkers—ought we to say subtle or dangerous—such as the German and Polish Romanticists, have already observed that "the French Revolution itself, by reason of its universality, played an unconscious Catholic role!" (*Revue Catholique des Eglises*, 1907, No. 631). It is precisely by means of His mystical body, by His Church, as universal as Redemption, it is by His intimate relationship with this great body which has its members everywhere, that Christ fully accomplishes His role of mediator of mankind! Oh wonderful truth! It is enough to ponder over this a little to see unthought of horizons unfolding themselves, to see whole supernatural worlds springing up before our minds! As man comprises within himself the lower universe, so redeemed mankind is summed up in its turn in the new Adam, and He offers it to His Father in His Person of Mediator, indissolubly united to His Church, to His mystical Body. It is in the natural

Christ that the human race is ransomed; it is by the mystical Christ that this reparation is made effective: "*All things are yours,*" says the Apostle, "*you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*" The head of the world is man, the head of the Church is Christ, and the head of Christ is God! "*Omnia vestra sunt, vos autem Christi, Christus autem Dei.*" (I Cor. III, 22).

Doctrine of the Mystical Body, according to St. Paul

This admirable doctrine is one of the favourite ideas of the great Apostle; he expatiates on it with delight. For St. Paul, the Church is, above all, the organized society of the faithful, the functions, spiritual graces and charisms of which are different indeed, but all directed towards its welfare as a complete whole. This suggests to him quite naturally the image of the organized body which has likewise many and diverse members, bound together into one living entity. To grasp this doctrine of the mystical body, it is necessary to examine its analogy with the human body. Saint Paul explains it as follows.

First, this mystical body is formed by the faithful: "*You are the body of Christ, and severally his members*" (I Cor. XII, 27). The physical body of the faithful, the very body that will fall into dust, does not escape this intimate alliance with Christ: "Know you not that your bodies are members of Christ? Am I then to take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot" (I Cor. VI, 15).

This body has one head, Christ. St. Paul goes on: *Christ is the head of the body, the Church: it is he who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead that so among all he himself may stand first. For in Him it hath well pleased* (the Father) *that all fulness should dwell...*" (Col. I, 18). And this head is perfected in some manner by its mystical body. The Church is the

fulness of Christ, His complement, His "pleroma"; "*God hath subjected all things beneath His feet, and hath given him for supreme head to the Church, which His body, the fulness of Him who is wholly fulfilled in all.*" (*Eph. I, 22*).

Finally, the variety of ecclesiastical functions and spiritual gifts has, according to the Apostle, no other end than the gradual formation of "his mystical body: *He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints in the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ.*" (*Eph. IV, 11-13*).

One may take for granted that St. Paul did not invent this doctrine himself. The truth expressed by it, that of our communion with the supernatural life of Christ, Jesus Himself had taught it in the parable of the vine when He said: "*I am the vine, ye the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, unless ye abide in me.*" (Jo. XV, 5, 4). But one can say that St. Paul understood the meaning of this doctrine in an extraordinary degree. Fanciful critics have delighted in opposing Master and disciple; they pretended to doubt who was ultimately the founder of Christianity: Paul or Jesus? but on the point here at issue, St. Paul the Theologian once more continues the formal teaching of the Master and his most authentic train of thought; only he enriches it with the analogy of the organized body. This very doctrine which, in the main, avers nothing else than the moral identity of Christ with His Church, St. Paul had learnt it from Christ Himself on a memorable day, and in a manner never to forget it; when blinded by the heavenly light and thrown to the ground, he had heard the voice saying: "*Saul, Saul,*

why persecutest thou me?", the voice, sweet yet terrible, replied to his anxious question: "*Who art thou, Lord?*", '*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest!*"

But Paul persecuted the Church! He had therefore to conclude: The Church is Jesus, she is the mystical Christ!

The Wonderful Consciousness of this Truth in the Primitive Church

How often in perusing documents which relate to the origin of Christianity have we, filled with admiration, come across the manifestations, touching or sublime, of this consciousness of our moral unity with Christ! Why is this mystery of Christ living, suffering, triumphing in His members so unfamiliar to the Catholics of to-day, whereas the souls of the first Christians literally lived on it, and by it were spontaneously raised to heroism? Hear with what accents Cyprian, the martyr-bishop, reminds martyrs and confessors of their glorious combats:

"How joyful Christ was on this occasion! How readily He, the protector of their faith, struggled and vanquished in His servants; to His faithful He gave help according to their confidence in Him; He was present at their struggle, He raised up, strengthened, animated the courage of His soldiers, the witnesses of His Name! He who has overcome death once for us, does so always in us!" (*Epist. X Cypr.*, ed. Jo. Oxon.)

The same faith manifests itself, with equal certitude of victory, in the well-known letter of the martyrs of the churches of Vienne and Lyons. The torturers fastened to the body of the deacon Sanctus red-hot plates of brass, but Sanctus continued unshaken in his confession of faith: "refreshed and strengthened by

the celestial fountain of living waters that flows from Christ";

"Christ, wrote the Confessors, suffering in him exhibited wonders; rendering the adversary powerless, and giving a proof to those that remained, that where the love of the Father prevails there nothing is terrifying, and where the glory of Christ, there nothing is painful." (*Eusebius*, E. H. L. V, c. I.)

Saint Blandina, a frail young girl, so weak that her mistress feared lest she would apostatize, tired out and overcome her tormentors: they relieved each other from morning till night, and yet they were exhausted. These brutes indeed were amazed that she still continued to breathe after her whole body had been torn asunder and pierced: she was "small, weak and contemptible"—this free soul was a slave—but yet, as the letter tells us, "clothed with Christ Jesus, the mighty and invincible wrestler"; and these words unfold to us the secret of her repeated victories. Bound to or rather hanging from a stake, as food for the wild beasts loosed against her, she prayed in a loud voice; and by seeing her as it were hanging on the cross, by hearing her earnest prayer, the athletes of Christ felt themselves inspired with great courage: for, as with their bodily eyes they saw her in the contest, through their sister they contemplated Him that was crucified for them, to persuade those that believe in Him that every one who suffers for Christ will for ever enjoy communion with the living God." (*Eusebius*, E.H., L.V. c. I).

Has this bright jewel among the "Acts of the Martyrs" ever struck you: the passion of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas? No poem could rival this

masterpiece of Christian modesty, grace and purity I will cite one passage of it; ask yourself whether anything could be more sublime than this.—The holy martyrs are in prison. At the time of imprisonment one of their companions, Felicitas, had been with child for eight months. For humane reasons, Roman Law forbids the woman nearing her time to be put to death. But Exhibition-day in the circus is at hand, and Saint Felicitas is sad: she fears to be separated from her brethren, to be kept for a later death. The confessors themselves are saddened at the thought of leaving behind one of those who had shared their common hopes; they join in prayer and intercession to the Lord. They had scarcely ended their prayer when lo! the young woman is taken with the labours of travail. As these sufferings drew from her a groan, one of the gaolers roughly remarked: "You who are now groaning in this way, what will you do when you are thrown to those beasts you defied when you refused to sacrifice?" And with a superb burst of faith and confidence. she answered full of joy: "It is I who suffer what I now suffer, but in the arena, Another will be in me who will suffer for me, because I in turn will suffer for Him!" St. Cyprian was right: "Christ who has overcome death once for us does so always in us!"

Christ in us, Christ in His Church. That is the thought that raised those Christians above all earthly things! Listen how at the beginning of the 3rd century, the dauntless Tertullian addresses the Christian sinner who shrinks from the trials of public penance before the whole Church; he softens and mingles a note of human tenderness

with his rigorist accents usually so stern. Taking up the analogy of the Apostle, he exclaims:

"The body cannot rejoice at the suffering of one of its members; far from it, the whole body must suffer, and as a whole help in the recovery. The Church is in two or three of the faithful, but the Church is Jesus Christ! Thus when you bend the knee before your brethren, it is Christ you move, Christ you beseech! Again, when they shed tears over you, it is still Christ who suffers, Christ who calls unto His Father! What a son asks, he easily obtains" (*De Poenit.* C. V)

Christ Suffering in His Members

Really this notion of Christ suffering in His members was to be found universally in the early Church. Indeed Christ glorified suffers no longer. He is for ever incapable of suffering, but the mystical Christ "makes up", as the Apostle says, "what is lacking to the sufferings" of the natural Christ. (Coloss. I, 24). "Christ's Passion, says St. Leo, will continue till the end of the world." And St. Paulinus of Nola states it also when he affirms:

"Christian, it is not you whom they hate, it is Christ who is living in you; this Christ whose work in you is this meekness which they contemn, this chastity which they detest...From the beginning of the ages, Christ suffers in His own .., in Abel slain by his brother, in Noah jeered at by his sons..., offered in Isaac, serving in Jacob, sold in Joseph, tossed about on land and sea in His Apostles, often immolated on the manifold crosses of His blessed Martyrs." (*Epist.* 38. P. L. 61, col. 359).

And the Bishop of Hippo, in his 361st sermon, uses a familar comparison to drive into the minds of his people this idea of our moral continuity with Christ:

"He who treads on your foot in a crowd, hurts your foot, he does not hurt your tongue; how is it then that your

tongue cries out: 'you crushed my foot'? The foot is trodden on, the tongue is not injured, but the body is one! If your tongue speak for your foot, how should Christ in Heaven not speak for the Christians?" (Sermo 361, M. P. L. 39, col. 1606).

Christ speaks for His members, Christ suffers in His members: "Suppose, my daughter, Christ told a mystic, suppose thy members are counted by the thousands, and that each one of them is at the same time racked by torments innumerable and varied, would it not be an unbearable suffering? Nevertheless, it is not only by thousands, but by an almost infinite number that my members and the sufferings racking them are to be counted. The pains of the martyrs, the virgins, the confessors, of all the elect are innumerable... Even after their death, I suffer by the torments they undergo in Purgatory. They are not dead members, as are the damned; they are living members, united to Me, and consequently I share their atoning pains." (Comtesse de Rambuteau, Paris, Lecoffre, 1905, p. 113).

Nothing can help us to understand the supernatural life, the Church's life of grace, better than this: the Church is Christ perfecting, completing Himself in the virtues of His faithful, in the merits and sufferings of His saints, and the life of these saints is nothing but the last part of Christ's life in this world. In each of these saints Christ is living, visible, under one of his various aspects, and the whole Church is Christ unfolding to their very limits the potentialities of the Person of the God-Man, the Saviour! Yes, Christ goes on immolating Himself and making atonement in the Carmelite; He is always poor, deprived of all in the poor Clare and the sons of St. Francis; He still obeys in the

Jesuit, He preaches in the sons of St. Dominic, He retires into the desert, prays and fasts with the Carthusian, with the sons of St. Bernard and of St. Benedict; He is ever tending the invalid with the children of St. John of God, the daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, the Little Sisters of the Poor; He is instructing children with the religious of the Sacred Heart, with the innumerable teaching Congregations; there is no misery over which he does not bend Himself, to which He does not apply one of His virtues! Oh, how beautiful is this Christ!

And He is far from having revealed His whole secret, displayed all His power, He is far, very far still from having said His last word! At times, He still ascends Calvary. Since His leaving the Supper Room and Pentecost, how many times has He not climbed the Hill!

The Church, a Collective Christ.

How beautiful is this mystical Christ, "this man extended everywhere", as St. Augustine says, "who has His head in heaven, and His members on earth" (*In Psalm.* 42, M. P. L. 36, col. 476). Centuries pass by, but Christ is all in all, perfecting Himself in His Church, "as the Emperor perfects himself in his army when it enlarges, when new provinces are formed, when the number of subjugated nations increases, so too Christ perfects Himself in those faithful souls who come to Him in ever increasing numbers. He is perfected in such a way however that all is fulfilled in all, that is to say, that all the virtues of Christ fill the souls of His faithful who, according to the Gospel, make Him advance in age and wisdom, not only with God, but with men" (St. Jerome, *In Epist. ad Ephes.* L. I, c. 1).

This great collective Christ in every age reproduces the virtues, the sacrifice and, in short, the moral image of the historical Christ. This great collective Christ feels in all ages the same grace as flows in her Head, human like other men, who are His members. This great collective Christ has for soul, for heart, the spirit of Jesus which is no other than the Holy Ghost. This explains why the Church is like unto her Head, why she acts like Him, and in the same spirit as He does. "Wonder not at what the Church is doing", as Bossuet so magnificently puts it, "for she knows the secret of Jesus-Christ!" One might ask oneself why those implacable enemies of the Church who recognize the moral superiority of Jesus are not more struck by the extraordinary likeness to be found between the conduct, spirit and action of the Church, and the conduct, spirit and action of Jesus. Obviously we do not mean to hold that this similitude is always equally perfect. We may well believe that it is to-day more accentuated and perfect than ever: but it has always been recognizable, ever during the darker periods of the Church's history when, to use the words of Mgr. d'Hulst "the weakness and frailty of humanity" blurred or disfigured her divine visage; indeed, even then, beneath her troubled and tortured countenance, her heavenly mien, her distinction of birth, or rather let us say her divine origin would pierce through. Even then, an attentive look could have recognized in this large body, now the prey of heresy, schism, and moral corruption, even in some prominent members-, "the living Christ, re-enacting over again in His Church the mystery of His joys, His sorrows and His glory!"

The Church, the Way to Jesus

It is absurd to suppose that the Church hinders souls from going to Jesus. The Jesus they seek, the ever-present Friend, He who forgives, who sanctifies, who consoles, who gives peace, is visible in the Church, is working in the Church: it is she who brings Him within the reach of souls, who puts them in communication with Him! Outside the Church, Jesus remains incomplete and, especially, ineffective: He is only an historic personage, not a living and active presence! It is only through the Spouse that the Beloved unites Himself to the soul. That is what Andrew de Bouvier returning to Rome *via* Geneva and Canterbury rightly asserts: "The Christian united to the Church experiences the direct action of Christ who governs the Church. Experience decides in favour of Catholicism, for it is precisely in the Roman Church that are to be found those souls who have enjoyed the fullest vision of God"; and we might well add: the most personal love of Christ! (Th. Mainage, *Les Temoins du Renouveau Catholique,* Paris, 1919, p. 189). If the Christian is another Christ, it must be granted that morally the Church is the visible Jesus; if the Bride resembles the Bridegroom in every respect, it is because He raises her to His level, because He loves her as a part of Himself, because the relation that unites her to Him is a relation of similarity, of honour, of common goods, because He has made her, for all times, the dispenser and instrument of His sanctifying influence. Jesus is not adequately conceived but through His mystical body; He transfers to it some of His divine prerogatives: His infallible teaching, His sanctifying virtue, and His unshakable constancy against the Powers of Evil.

Some Consequences of this Truth:

(1) *The Church, a Supernatural Society.*

How many facts are explained and how many truths are set in broad daylight by the radiance of this fundamental truth: *the Church is the mystical body of Christ!* The philosopher who discovers in her nothing but an "administrative organization created by men, weak and subject to decay like them" has not yet recognized the Church; he has not yet identified her; he has passed by without seeing her mystery, viz. that she is a supernatural society surpassing civil societies by all the grandeur of her divinity. He understands nothing of the devotion, yes of the devotion, of the Catholic for his Church, nor of the filial love which caused an Ignatius of Loyola to exclaim: "We must be prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, our Holy Mother the Hierarchical Church". (Exerc. Spir. *Regulæ ut cum Orthodoxa Ecclesia sentiamus*). Whilst the Catholic lovingly submits to his Church, and even if need be, gives his life, as did St. Thomas a Becket, for the defence of her rights, the unbeliever, the carnal man, who ignores her divine and supernatural beauty, is instinctively driven to subordinate her to the civil power!

(2) *The Holy Ghost is given in the Church alone.*

Whilst the Catholic receives the doctrines of his Church as so many divine utterances, the non-Catholic flatters himself that he receives the immediate communications of the Spirit outside the Catholic hierarchy. Against her infallible teaching he appeals to the Holy Ghost, against the religion of authority to the religion of the spirit! Empty imaginations! Deadly illusion! The Spirit animates

the mystical body of Christ, he governs and protects it as the soul does its body: "The Holy Ghost", exclaims St. Augustine "is not given outside the Church." (Serm. 268, M. P. L. 38, col. 1232). If you want to live by the Spirit of Christ, be in the body of Christ! We have the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost, only in so far as we love the Church with a love that makes us persevere in her unity and charity! In the Church, the Holy Ghost submits his inspirations to Rule and Authority! Because of this we find in our great Catholic mystics, in a St. Theresa, a St. Catherine of Siena, a St. Francis of Assisi, a St. John of the Cross, a scrupulous obedience to the directions of the hierarchy! With us, rule and discipline are the guarantees of religious inspiration and freedom.

(3) "*Outside the Church, there is no Salvation!*"

"Outside the Church, no salvation!" What a storm has been aroused about 'this cruel dogma of intolerance,' as the "Vicaire Savoyard" of Jean-Jacques Rousseau has it, about 'this judgment that has for so long unmercifully been pronounced over every single "heretic" coffin, as a slanderer of Catholic piety says. And with regard to this famous saying, how many sensitive souls have been enraged against the 'inhuman truths of Catholicism'!

Nevertheless, how clear is this axiom, how easy to grasp, flowing as it does, calm and serene, from the dogma of the universal redemption and absolute mediation of Christ! Evidently, there is no salvation, no remission of sins but in Christ! If so, how can we escape the argument of St. Augustine against the followers of Donatius: "To eternal salvation" he told them "no one can arrive, unless he has

Christ for head! But no one can have Christ as head, unless he is a member of the body of Christ, which is the Church"...(*Contra Donatistas*, *Epist.* 49 M. P. L. 43, col. 396.)[1] And the great Doctor of the Church has not omitted to point out a practical and unavoidable deduction drawn from his speculative doctrine: "A Christian should fear nothing more than separation from the body of Christ." (*Tract. in Jo.* 6, M. P. L. 35, col. 1618). Indeed as the amputated limb dies by the sole fact of its separation from the body, because when cut off it does not take away the vital principle which is jealously retained by the body, so also does that Christian of necessity die to the life of God, who

[1] To ward off any mistake regarding the import of a dogma which is taken as the standard of Catholic intolerance, it may be useful to state its precise meaning: whosoever '*by his own fault*' abstains unto death from being a member of the Catholic Church, excludes himself by the very fact from supernatural happiness.

The dogma absolutely condemns every formula of religious indifference, such as that 'one can work out one's salvation in all religions, and by the sole practice of natural religion.' Only invincible ignorance of the true Church or an error made in good faith about her can dispense one from membership of the Church, this membership being at the same time a necessity, a precept and a means of salvation.

But there are souls who by faith and charity belong to Christ, though not being part of the visible and hierarchical body of Christ. By this very fact, they really belong to His mystical body, receive His influence of grace, and without knowing it, have implicitly formed the desire of becoming part of the Catholic Church.

Such souls are numerous, Catholic at heart, without knowing it. The dogma is both a more tolerant and a more intolerant one than is commonly thought. A *more intolerant* one, for there is no hope of salvation for the soul that wilfully remains outside the redeeming influence of the mystical Christ. A *more tolerant* one, for this influence spreads far more widely than the mere visible and hierarchical body.

On this point the following works could be usefully consulted: E. Hugon, O.P. "*Hors de l'Eglise point de Salut*," Paris, Téqui, 1907 and J. V. Bainvel, S.J. "*Hors de l'Eglise point de Salut.*" Paris, 1913.

knowingly cuts himself off from the Church, who giving up unity rejects by this act truth and charity, who thinking it below his dignity to be any more a member, wants to become in himself the Whole, a proud and lonely Whole, and thus withdraws himself from the sphere of influence of the Holy Ghost!

(4) *The Fulness of Religious Life is found only in the Church.*

Does not daily experience confirm this dogmatic truth in a most striking way? Whilst most of the "separated" churches merely vegetate and openly repine at the increasing disaffection and indifference of their faithful, loudly lamenting the loss of faith, the proselytism and the sectarian zeal of earlier times, whilst some of them in consternation witness the deadly and scandalous clash between their faith and their theology, the Catholic Church stands out overflowing with a religious life deep and genuine, contagious and victorious. This life shines forth in broad daylight by the inexhaustible fecundity of her works, her generous zeal, her sincerity and ardour of devotion, her extraordinary intensity of interior life, an attraction that never seems to abate towards a life of perfection and self-denial. It is shown also by the great wave of mysticism which in these our days is passing over those souls which are best fitted to represent her ideal and traditional piety. And, as life calls upon life and draws it to itself, so from all quarters the choicest spirits are coming to us, they who long for fulness of 'faith', for the 'supernatural' sterling and unalloyed, who hate compromise and half-measures in those religious aspirations which engage our whole being

in its most personal and intimate depths. From all quarters those chosen souls who desire peace through the full satisfaction of those aspirations, come to us driven by the very disappointments and anxieties of their position: whilst heresy and unbelief attract only the unworthiest of the Church's children, she on the contrary draws to herself all that is best and noblest in other bodies! This is surely a remarkable fact! It is towards the Catholic Church that the great current of 'conversions' perpetually flows, and thanks above all to the Rev. Fr. Mainage, the 'converts' form a new chapter adding a fresh proof to the old treatise "On the True Religion."

The Intimate Bond between the Church and Christ,—The Catholic's Motive for loving the Church

Finally, if all true Catholics love their Church, it is because their faith does not allow them to detach her from the Person of Jesus-Christ! Faith tells them that it is through the Church, as through His body, that the divine Master of regenerated souls is unceasingly present to the human race, that it is through her that He instructs them, cures them, redeems them, loads them with favours and causes the flood of His divine grace to flow over their souls. For a Catholic, to love Jesus without venerating and loving the Church is a position incompatible with his faith that reveals to him his Church and his Master in mutual and inalienable relation. As a matter of fact, such a position is intelligible only by the scandal of the "separated churches" and the shocking spectacle of their variety, born of the will of man, not of the will of the Word Incarnate. Only a rationalist can be forgiven such a position, for he alone can be excused for seeing and

being able to see only the outside of the "*temple of the living God*" (II Cor. VI, 16); and therefore for failing to distinguish it from the buildings erected by men, he alone may write without scruple: "A church as far as it is an organism, is purely a human affair: "For the Catholic, such ideas about the Church are according to 'the sense of the flesh', to use the words of St. Paul; they imply speaking about the Church as did those heretics whom he brands, i.e., "*not holding fast by the head* [which is Christ] *from which the whole body, nourished and knit together by means of the joints and ligaments, doth grow with a growth that is of God.*" (Col. II, 19).

Ignorance or Forgetfulness of this Bond,—The Reason of the Church's Unpopularity

In fact, it is only because this her ineffable relation with Jesus is forgotten or ignored that the Church is doomed to remain misunderstood, or to become unpopular. It is not in Catholic surroundings, but in Protestant environments, where the diversity of creeds necessarily entails religious scepticism, that the formula: 'Love Jesus, hate the Church' could accurately express a state of mind widely spread among the masses. From an inquiry undertaken by the *Expository Times* (January 1920) it is plain that although the Person of Jesus was always admired by the English workmen, the Church is far from enjoying a like favour with the working classes. Mr. Eastman of Hull could declare: "I have addressed thousands of my fellow-workers up and down the country, and the mention of the name of Lansbury and Lloyd George, and Smillie and Thomas caused dissension and discussion, but the Name of Jesus held them united together." One is

touched at learning that the workers on the land in Somerset, poor people earning from ten to twelve shillings a week, more heartily applaud the speaker who talks to them about 'the things Jesus taught' than the one who announces that their pay will be increased by five shillings a week. "Back to Christ!" is their motto; but also "Back from the Church!" And this paper from which I quote thinks their grievances could be fairly summed up in the following verdict: "The (Anglican) Church itself, as it is now organized, is not the true representative of Christ on earth." In this judgment, in which even the benefit of extenuating circumstances is denied to the chief culprit, the National Church, something must no doubt be ascribed to the old non-conformist grudge against the Established Church. This episcopalian Church seems too rich, too aristocratic, too closely connected with a political party, reputed hostile to democratic reforms: nevertheless in all this there is for the Anglican Church matter for a serious examination of conscience, a clear invitation to confront herself with Him whom she recognizes as her head.

What the Catholic owes to His Church?

And, we Catholics, what are we doing for the only true Church?

Something we can do for her! for it depends on us that the level of sanctity should continually be rising in her. It depends on us that she should appear less human and more divine! It depends on us that her holiness should send forth a light ever more clear and brilliant!

In this great body, at present, life and death are struggling; it has members that are dead, members

that are living, and members in which life overflows. The former hold to the head only by faith; the latter belong to it fully both by faith and sanctifying grace; the last, the saints, have for role to astound the world by 'the incomprehensible riches' of these two lives. It is in accepting without restriction the vivifying influence of Christ, by surrendering themselves to it, that the faithful contribute their part in the sanctification of His mystical body. Christ becomes more visible in His Church, when she herself becomes more pure in her morals, more detached from temporal goods, more heroic in penance, more persevering in prayer, more zealous in her apostolate, more bounteous and unselfish in her charity! And it is in us alone that she is able to realize all these attributes!

"*Each soul that uplifts itself, uplifts the world,*" wrote Elisabeth Leseur; each Catholic who sanctifies himself, sanctifies his Church and thereby increases her power for action. The best manner of loving the Church is to accept the whole of her infallible teaching and sanctifying power. It is in the Church alone that 'the Communion of Saints' really exists; for, according to Nicetas of Remesiana, it is the Church alone that gives it! Everything which the Catholic owes to Christ, obedience, love and awe, he owes it to the Spouse of Christ.

The Supernatural Beauty of the Church

How can we describe this Spouse, her majesty and supernatural beauty? As a wayfarer on this earth, she conducts the serried ranks of the elect through the river of time to the calm harbour of eternity; she possesses the waters that regenerate and the words that absolve; she sings in her course the hymns of her fatherland, and her songs shorten

the hours of exile; every day she erects thousands of altars, gathers round them her children and immolates the Lamb, majestic yet gentle, who taketh away the sins of the world. She holds constant communication with the goal of her pilgrimage, the longed for City of bliss, and the narrow way of death stays neither her remembrance nor her prayer; but these go to solace, in the world beyond, a mysterious distress which is not beyond the reach of her mercy.

O Catholic Church, thou art the home of my soul! To thee I owe companionship in my banishment, nay more, my sonship in the Father's house. By thy means I number countless brothers and sisters, in all parts of the world, "from one end of the earth to the other': wherever Catholics hear Mass, say their rosary, confess their sins, honour the immaculate Mother of God; wherever they recite the prayer I learnt in my infancy; wherever they believe what I believe and love what I love; wherever persecuted, pursued because of our common creed they call to their aid either the help of my prayers or of my alms given in charity; wherever the true body of Christ, which is the Catholic Church, grieves with the suffering or takes part in the joy of the lowliest or most neglected of its members, there is the true home of my soul! There too is Christ, my Head, for according to the sublime word of the great Catholic poet "Christ is Roman!" This gentle murmur which sometimes becomes perceptible to my heart, this continuous whispering which the crash of earthly empires cannot drown, is the sweet echo of Catholic prayer in the world; it comes from the lips of millions uttering

the same syllables, and this uninterrupted supplication is Christ's body which still groans in anguish until its Head comes again. In this supplication, Catholics of the twentieth century, your voice only takes up and continues the voice of your forefathers, the voice of your dead; for your dead, though they have become invisible, have not ceased to belong to the body of Christ:

"Each of us has a share in the groanings of the whole body" says St. Augustine in his wonderful commentary on Psalm 85th: "Thou hast cried in the day of thy life, and thy life hath passed away: another hath succeeded thee, and hath cried during his life: thou here, another there, a third elsewhere; thus it is that in the succession of his members Christ hath cried the whole day long! He is as one man to the end of ages. The same members of Christ are groaning: of these members some already repose in Him, and some are still crying on this earth, others will wail when we shall be at rest, and after those others still. It is therefore the groaning of the whole body that the Prophet has in view when he says: 'I have cried to thee all the day'." (Discourse on the 85th Psalm: Sermon to the people on the Hopes of the Church.)

Catholic Solidarity in Time

Can one describe more magnificently the uninterrupted continuity of the body of Christ in time and its omnipresence in space? Centuries pass, but in each is present the body of Christ; its form remains unchanged and it is always realizing the idea or exemplar of its invisible Head. It is merely the members who compose it that change and follow each other unceasingly from generation to generation: for, this body is the living organism which unites with Christ the elect of all ages, the glorious Saints of centuries past, as well as the living saints now hidden amongst us. The faith of the mystical body does not change, neither does its prayer: it is only

the faithful that change, whilst even then they express and pour forth their prayers under the unchangeable vaults of the same material temple. However there is, and there will be, up to the end of time, but One faithful Believer and One who prays: the Church who has believed and prayed in our forefathers, as she believes and prays through their children's children. This prayer links up the living with the dead: "*And now, O Lord*", she repeats in each succeeding generation, "*think of me and take not revenge of my sins; neither remember my offences, nor those of my parents*!" (Tob. III, 3). And thereby the body of Christ makes us the offspring of grace of our beloved departed, the spiritual descendants of the saints, the moral heirs of millions of Catholics "who are gone before us with the sign of faith and sleep in the sleep of peace." So it is that, for those within the mystical body, even death does not break the union of souls, any more than absence and distance in space.

Catholic Solidarity in Space

Allow me to recall a personal experience. I was present one day at High Mass in one of our village Churches. At the moment I entered the nave, two voices were singing, one the voice of a child, clear and silvery as children's voices are, but hesitating and tripping over each versicle. It alternated with the voice of the clerk, an old man, quavering and singing in a nasal tone, quickly, too quickly, as those do who make a living out of it and think that the service must not be prolonged beyond the appointed time. Perhaps you have been present at such a performance: it is at the same time lamentable, touching and banal.

But what those voices sang was the eternal "*Credo*," the unaltered belief of Nicea, the faith of Athanasius the Great, of Basil, of Chrysostom, of Augustine. These simple singers did not realise the full meaning of the words, yet they were truths concerning all mankind; they told of the present life and of the life to come, it was the whole Catholic dogma with its majestic calmness and statements in turn consoling or fearful: the inevitable coming of the Judge of the living and the dead, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting!

Never before had I such a clear insight into the Catholicity of my Church as I then had in that poor village Church. For I knew that this very same "*Credo*," these very formulæ were sung in the Roman basilicas and in the chapels of Africa, on the banks of the Rhine as well as on the borders of the great rivers of Asia, in the old European cities, those great museums of art, where every stone tells us of history, as in the towns of the New World, sprung up during the last twenty or thirty years, those 'parvenus' without history or tradition.

I learned later that this unity of doctrine, this catholicity of truth which delighted me so much in my Church, was but one aspect of her inner life, only a ray of that splendour of the body of Christ. I understood how the unity of the supernatural life perfected and completed in us the exterior unity that follows from subordination to the one visible authority.

And I was proud of being 'Catholic,' disdainful of schisms, sects and conventicles, that live—if they can be said to live—*on* Christ, but not *of* Christ and *in* Christ. And without contemning these separated 'brethren,' I could not but feel pity for them, re-

calling to my mind that proud profession of faith of Pacianus, the Catholic bishop of Barcelona of the 4th century: "Christian is my name, Catholic is my surname; the first names me, the second distinguishes me; the former classifies me, the latter designates me."—(*Ep. I*, No. 4). Above all, it seemed to me that henceforth I should have a part in the love of the saints for the Church; for I understood that not to love her was the same as not to know her. Catholics, the Church is the body of Christ, we must therefore love her as a part of Christ. This is sufficient; it is useless to seek other motives for this love.

CONCLUSION

It was not without genuine emotion that I read one day this profession of love towards his Church,—poor national Church, whose boundaries are fixed where the North Sea separates England from the Continent —from the pen of an Anglican:

"I love my own Church with all my heart, I know none purer, none nobler, none wiser, none more comprehensive. In her communion I was born, in her communion I will die. She blessed my infant cradle, I pray God that she may close my dying eyes. She baptised me at the font of the lustral water of baptism; may she bend over my lowly grave with the words of benediction."—(*The Church*, Rev. F. W. Farrar, in "*Expository Times*," vol. 11th, October 1899-September 1900).

Catholics, if Error is capable of so much love, how much more ought Truth to love?

To this question truly Catholic hearts will find, we trust, an answer worthy of themselves, and worthy of the Church of Jesus Christ!

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